

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding the Navy's decision to issue a termination letter yesterday for the VH-71 presidential helicopter program. The congressman is a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, which funds defense programs.

"First and foremost, this termination letter was fully expected and does not change the circumstances surrounding my efforts, as well as those of others in Congress, to continue funding Lockheed Martin's presidential helicopter program. This is just another step in the process. The Navy is simply carrying out the direction it received from Defense Secretary Gates to cancel the presidential helicopter program.

"The Constitution is clear that Congress has the authority and responsibility to determine how federal money is spent. Ultimately, the decision on whether to continue the current presidential helicopter program will be made by Congress through the annual appropriations process, which is set to begin in the coming weeks. The Navy's termination letter will in no way impact Congress' decision on how to move forward. I am pleased that the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense has spoken out in favor of continuing the Lockheed Martin presidential helicopter program and I look forward to working very closely with him and others in the House in order to continue funding this very important initiative.

"Canceling the program at this point makes no sense whatsoever. At least \$3.2 billion has already been spent on the current presidential helicopter program. If the program is canceled, early termination fees would bring the total cost to approximately \$4 billion and result in no helicopters being added to the presidential fleet. An entire new fleet of modern, Increment 1 presidential helicopters can be completed within the original budget constraints, but the administration is dismissing this possibility for political reasons. While trying to claim that the helicopter project should be terminated to save taxpayer money, the administration is ignoring the fact that it would be far more costly to cancel the program and rebid it than it would be to continue the construction of the helicopters currently being produced by Lockheed Martin.

"The fact remains that the President of United States continues to fly in an aging helicopter fleet that was designed more than a half century ago, constructed in the 1970's, lacks the necessary seating capacity, and doesn't have the modern safety and communications equipment the president needs. With so much money already invested in the current program, which has already produced nine highly capable helicopters that are undergoing test flights, it makes no sense to do anything other than continue with the current plan."